

# Observations on the Cape Lycaenid *Phasis malagrida* (Wallengren)\*, with the description of a new race

By C. G. C. DICKSON

After being well known to Trimen and presumably a few of the rather later Cape collectors, including Lightfoot, this distinctive species, with its beautifully marked underside, seems to have been "lost" for a considerable period. Over thirty years ago a determined effort was made to rediscover it in the area above Cape Town from which it had originally been recorded and this eventually met with success when, on 2nd February 1935, a fine male specimen was found on Lion's Head, followed soon by other specimens in reasonable numbers but restricted to a very limited extent of ground.

In March 1937, the butterfly was again located in the Cape Peninsula, at Llandudno, and in considerable numbers. The area concerned was subsequently chosen as the site for a battery and although *Ph. malagrida* continued for some years to maintain its hold on this piece of the mountainside, it is now many years since specimens were last seen there and no other locality has, up to the present, been found for it in this portion of the Peninsula.

When the author was collecting on the Paarl Mountain on 15th March 1938, another race of this butterfly was encountered on ground covered with short vegetation resembling that of the Cape Peninsula localities which have been mentioned; while, on 31st December 1956, a few examples of the same race were met with on one of the higher portions of the Paarde Berg, some 10 miles N.N.W. of the Paarl Berg.\*\*

*Phasis malagrida* appears only in the second half of the summer, up to early autumn, and is believed to be single-brooded with, however, a prolonged period of emergence. In the Cape Peninsula, it has been noticed from 2nd February to as late as 20th April, when only very few specimens have still been on the wing. In common with various other Lycaenids, this butterfly is much attracted to the pink flowers of a common *Mesembrianthemum*.

The larva has refused to eat any of the plants on which eggs have been laid and it is thought that the larval life is spent underground in association with ants. The species is unaffected by veld fires provided these do not occur at the height of emergence.

## *Phasis malagrida paarlensis* subsp. nov.

This race, at least as regards the male, is of a greater average size than *Ph. malagrida malagrida* from the Cape Peninsula and the orange areas of the upperside are considerably larger in all wings.

\**Cygaritis malagrida* Wallengren, K. Sv. Vet. Akad. Handl., 1857, Rhop. Caffr., p. 43.

\*\*Mr. Inge Persson of the Swedish Natural History Museum, Stockholm, has very kindly sent on loan to the writer the type specimen of *Cygaritis malagrida* Wallengren. It is a male specimen, in good condition, and indubitably represents the Cape Peninsula race of the butterfly.

*Male. Upperside.*

*Forewing.* Orange commences nearer base and, generally leaving relatively narrower brownish-black hind-marginal borders, is also of greater depth than in the nominate race while, inferiorly (though here more or less considerably suffused with dark scaling), it reaches part of the innermargin.

*Hindwing.* Orange begins much nearer base than in nominate race and consequently occupies a far greater field while, near the anterior angle of the wing, it tends to extend, on the whole, further upwards; the orange clear-cut and very largely devoid of dark scaling, and the veins not or at the most only slightly dark-scaled outwardly.

White spaces in cilia of both wings inclined to be a little narrower than in nominate race.

*Underside.*

*Forewing.* The oblique white streak with dark edging outwardly, near apex, generally noticeably less regular outwardly than in nominate race; submarginal dark line usually broader, and more broken up into separate markings between the veins. White spaces in the cilia and inward extension of the white colouring from these spaces rather less prominently developed on the whole than in nominate race.

*Hindwing.* The light markings which form an intricate pattern and have a metallic sheen, rather less whitish than in nominate race; the submarginal arrow-shaped markings usually somewhat better defined. Cilia with the light spaces rather less pronounced than in nominate race. Length of forewing: 13.25-15.25 mm. (14.5 mm., in holotype).

*Female. Upperside.*

*Forewing.* Orange of about same extent as in nominate females in which it is most fully developed, but more clear of dark scaling than in the majority of such specimens, and its demarkation in relation to dark portions of the wing better defined.

*Hindwing.* Orange clearer and commencing nearer base than in nominate race, with the sub-basal portion which is partly obscured by darker scaling, itself beginning closer to the base than is usually the case in nominate females.

*Underside.*

*Forewing.* Features as noted for the male.

*Hindwing.* As in male, light markings rather less whitish than in nominate race.

One very small female (forewing, 13.5 mm.) is unusually dark on the upperside, for this race, while the hindwing underside has the finer markings less conspicuous than usual.

Length of forewing: 16-16.75 mm. in normally sized specimens available for study (16 mm., in allotype).

♂ Holotype, CAPE PROVINCE: Paarl Mountain, 22.iii.1956 (C. G. C. Dickson); British Museum Reg. No. Rh. 18548.

♀ Allotype, data as for holotype other than date of capture of 25.iii.1947; British Museum Reg. No. Rh. 18549.

Paratypes presented to British Museum (Natural History), CAPE PROVINCE: Paarde Berg, 31.xii.1956 (C.G.C.D.), 2 ♂♂; as allotype, 3 ♂♂.

Paratype in Coll. South African Museum, data as immediately above, 1 ♂.

Paratypes in author's collection, CAPE PROVINCE: Paarl Mountain, 22.iii.1956 (C.G.C.D.), 1 ♀; 26.ii.1950, (A. J. H. Duke), 7 ♂♂, 2 ♀♀.

In addition to Trimen's full description and valuable notes on *Ph. malagrida* in his "South African Butterflies", Vol. II, pp. 194-195 (1887), an excellent account of the habits, etc., of this very interesting butterfly is given by Swanepoel in "Butterflies of South Africa", pp. 125-126, Pl. VI, figs. 7, 8 (1953), the race figured being the Paarl one. The species is also described and figured in Murray's "South African Butterflies: A Monograph of the Family Lycaenidae", pp. 113-114, fig. 61 (1935). Incidentally, it would seem very doubtful if the Transvaal female specimen mentioned in Trimen's work represented an insect which, to-day, would be considered to be conspecific with *Ph. malagrida*.\*\*\*

With regard to the name of the locality which has, in turn, been used for the new race, it may be mentioned that "Paarl" (pearl) is derived from one of the immense granite rocks on the mountain concerned, and not far from which the butterfly was first found.

Mr G. E. Tite has very kindly read through the manuscript of this article before its publication.

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## A fortnight in Connemara, 12th to 29th August 1966

By Captain J. ELLERTON, R.N.

We left by car for Bristol at 6.30 a.m. on Friday, 12th August; at the airport we had a delay of a couple of hours as the plane was late in leaving Dublin, but we were airborne soon after 1.0 p.m. and arrived at Cork some two hours later. We were soon on our way and arrived at our destination, a cottage on Killary Harbour, three miles outside Leenane, Co. Galway, by 8.0 p.m.—a very comfortable and easy way of travelling to Ireland, so easy and comfortable that I understand they are discontinuing this route next year so that we may appreciate the long trek and inconvenience of the boat ferry from Fishguard!

As this was essentially a family holiday no light trap or generator was taken—there wasn't room in the car, just a case of setting boards and a couple of nets.

The cottage is situated overlooking Killary Harbour on a hill above the Benown river, well surrounded by trees, masses of rhododendrons and, beyond, the inevitable acres of bog. By the Benown is a splendid old

\*\*\*This specimen which answers to Trimen's description in all but size is in the collection of the British Museum (Natural History); it bears a hand-written label (in script and capitals) "Trans-Vaal. S. AFRICA.", and on the reverse the initials "D. A.". A second label gives the Trimen catalogue No. "p. 282 no. 6". Trimen gave the expanse of this insect as 2 inches, 7 lines, surely an error for a member of this group. The specimen actually measures 1 inch 7 lines. It is in fact a form of *Phasis wallengreni*, and very similar to certain examples of that species in the B.M. (N.H.) coming from Orangemouth, and Springbok in Namaqualand. This does suggest that Trimen's insect really came from the same area, and not from Transvaal at all. (G. E. T.)